

27. Do you believe in human rights?

INTRODUCTION

[Note that this activity suits children from Year 5 up, particularly if they are used to holding debates and giving their opinions.]

Start by reminding the children of the importance of respecting each other's point of view, even when we disagree, and that there are some difficult issues being raised in this session.

Explain that some of us might change our minds as we hear new ideas expressed by people in the group. Before giving our own view we could show we have heard what others are saying by beginning with such statements as:

- 'Some people might think that...'
- 'People in this group might be worried about...'
- 'I like the idea of... but I think that...'

This could help to 'de-personalise' some emotive issues and ideas. Remind children of previous learning about Rights of the Child. Can they name 10 very quickly? Show them the list, e.g., from www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf Which ones are important to them? Have they heard anything in the news that has been connected to Rights of the Child, e.g., people who are currently living in a refugee camp?

Explain that this week we are going to think a bit more about the Rights of the Child, and in particular, Article 22 about refugees:

If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, governments must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all their human rights.

ACTIVITY

Start by making sure children understand how a child might become a refugee. (They may have seen or read things about refugees already.) It is important to say that a true refugee is someone who has to leave their home or country and seek refuge elsewhere e.g., because of war or persecution or famine.

Now ask children if they agree that governments should do what they can to help. Refer back to Article 22. Children could vote at this stage either by simple hands up or by writing yes or no on a

small piece of paper (ballot slip) and putting the piece of paper in a box (secret ballot). At this stage, most, if not all children, usually agree that governments should take care of refugees.

Now ask children to hold a debate about the following question: **Should the UK government help refugees by allowing them into the country?** Ask some children to be on either side – whether it is their opinion or not. They may need some prompts about arguments on either side, for example:

Yes

- Everyone has a right to be cared for...
- It's not their fault if their country is at war...
- How would you feel if you were a refugee?

No

- We have no space for more people...
- They might not really be refugees...
- They might bring diseases to our country!

Encourage the children to debate the issues, giving opinions on either side. To distance themselves from the arguments remind them they could voice opinions without taking ownership of them by saying things like, '**Some people might think that...**'

After debating the issues for a while, ask the children to vote again to say if they agree that governments should do what they can to help. Have the votes changed now? Are more children against the idea? Is it easy or hard to let everyone have their human rights? What happens when one person has to give up (or compromise e.g. have less space to live or play) their rights in order for someone else to have theirs?

It is important throughout this session to say that, in a democracy, there are often no simple answers, and usually compromises must be made. That means it is all the more important to talk about the issues and consider the *evidence* and *reasons* that are available. All the same, if we believe we all have the same rights as each other and that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a good document, then perhaps we do have a responsibility to help others?

CONCLUSIONS

Encourage the children to think again about why people leave one place to go to another, e.g. war, famine etc. Can we put ourselves in their shoes? Is there anything governments can do or we can do to help refugees in other ways, e.g. we can support the work of Oxfam or other charities that try to help people in other countries?